

"And they shall be for you cities of refuge . . . so that anyone who inadvertently kills a person shall be able to escape there." (35:12,15)

One who killed *b'shogeg*, inadvertently, was to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the *Kohen Gadol*. Consequently, not all killers received the same punishment. While some had to remain a considerable length of time, some were liberated quickly. Not so with the deliberate killers. Each one received a similar punishment. Why is there such a discrepancy between the punishments of the deliberate and the inadvertent murderer? The *Korban Chagigah* offers an interesting response, which serves as a lesson in regard to appreciating the apportionment of punishment.

In the case of the intentional murderer, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of deliberateness. Therefore, all willful murderers receive the same punishment. In regard to the unintentional, we are faced with varied definitions of accident. Indeed, there are situations of inadvertent murder that could be viewed as negligent and those which can be viewed as voluntary. Hashem, Who knows the truth, discerns between these degrees and determines His punishment accordingly.

One whose act of violence borders on the deliberate will find himself remaining in the city of refuge for a longer period than one whose act was clearly accidental. Hashem's punishment is always "*middah k'neged middah*," measure for measure. The retribution will always be commensurate with the transgression. While no person will receive more punishment than he deserves, neither will an individual receive less than his due.